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THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MINISTRY IN INDUSTRIAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

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ABSTRACT

The moral and social problems in modern industrial society are foremost in men's thinking. New emotional attitudes are being created. How are these to be related to religious ideals?

1. If the church exists solely to save the individual for a future life, no social leadership is engendered.

2. If it be held that the regeneration of individuals will automatically lead to social reforms, it becomes evident that mere good will is not sufficient without detailed knowledge. Moreover a person's attitudes are largely determined by the stimulus of his environment.

3. If the minister confines himself to establish general truths, avoiding controversial questions, he will inevitably become a defender of conventional ideals, and will furnish no insight into new problems.

4. The only alternative is a really accurate knowledge of facts and forces in the social struggle. The minister today should have "the best training in the social sciences our universities can provide."

There has been in recent years a growing recognition of the moral significance of the economic process. The rapid and marked changes in industrial organization, its greatly increased productivity, and its far-reaching influences upon the lives and fortunes of the people have focused public attention upon it. Under modern methods of production huge masses of capital are concentrated in a few hands, giving to its owners or directors tremendous power over others; great numbers of laborers, dependent for toil upon these owners of the productive instruments, are, by reason of their common interests, organized into unions which are developing attitudes of mind and habits of thought of profound social importance. The modern city, with its organized effort to procure water supply, fire protection, sanitary conditions, efficiency in administration, public ownership and management of its utilities, and often voluntary co-operative movements for the distribution of

utilities, is a direct product of industrial development. The city has developed associated living, a consciousness of strength in united action, and a spirit of democracy that is finding expression in manifold ways. On the other hand, the home life has been greatly influenced by industrial changes; the home has ceased to be a center of the economic activity of the family; its educational function has been taken from it to a large extent; the status of woman has changed and the environment of the children greatly altered.

But with the great increase in wealth and the increase in the average well-being there has come also greater poverty, greater dependence upon others for employment, periods of depression and unemployment, and the growth of industrial classes with a spirit of antagonism to each other. The minister as a philanthropic worker will find misery and suffering that root in economic conditions; he will discover the unemployed and the unemployable, disease that springs from malnutrition and improper housing, extreme poverty that cripples effort and denies any equality of opportunity to the immature, and senseless luxury which promotes idleness and stifles ambition. But he will also come in touch with great movements for social betterment—some of them springing out of private enterprise itself, others organized and directed by the state, still others arising out of the united activity of workers or the sympathetic interest of philanthropic and socially minded citizens. At any rate, he will soon appreciate the fact that as a leader in morals and religion he must understand the industrial life about him and its reaction upon the emotions, ideas, attitudes, and so upon the character of his people.

There is a school of thinkers who tell us that the economic life of a people is basal and causal in all spiritual development; that out of it arise the family organization, the political institutions, the classes or castes, the religious beliefs, in fact the entire social structure; and that no great change in any part of this structure can be accomplished without some corresponding

adjustment of the economic process. Wars are either struggles of groups for the great feeding places (tribal) or for a share in the fodder (class). Sociologists have turned their attention to the significance of the economic factor in the psychic life of the individual and in the development of social organization. The change, for example, in occupation from hunting to agriculture brought with it a new psychosis, a different mentality, gave rise to a new class of virtues, changed the whole structure of the group organization, produced a new type of family life, and developed private property. The change that is going on today from the old industrial organization to the present system is producing emotional evaluations, mental attitudes, and moral ideas not less momentous, and is modifying almost as profoundly the social structure. One does not need to accept the economic interpretation of history; it is enough to recognize the economic element as one great factor in all human progress, to understand that real leadership in religion and ethics demands earnest consideration of this phase of organized life.

If the economic order were fundamentally antagonistic to morals and religion, then some harmony would need to be established else one or the other would perish. The essential impulses of the individual life must find rational and harmonized expression if a unified personality is to be attained; and in like manner since our social institutions are the counterparts of these impulses, they too must have unity in their variety else there is disorder in the spiritual life of mankind. The religious and industrial institutions of society can no more be divorced from each other than one can sunder within the soul the moral or religious impulses from the economic. The question of this paper is what attitude should the minister take to the economic problems in his community?

Perhaps the question may be answered by asking first, what has been the attitude of ministers in the past? I think it will be admitted by every student of history that the great

religious leaders and preachers of every age have concerned themselves profoundly with the social, political, and industrial life of their time. The great prophets of Israel gave their message to meet the social problems of the nation; Jesus expressed principles and ideas that he held to be fundamental for political and economic organization; and the great preachers of our own generation are men who interpret the moral and religious significance of every phase of organized social life.

But can we affirm that the rank and file of the ministers of our churches, either today or in the past, have undertaken any serious leadership in guiding and directing thought and action in the industrial problems of their time? What has been or what is the attitude of the church and of her ministers in this important matter?

There has always been at least one section within the church that has viewed its task as one of preparing the individual for a *future* social order which does not root in or grow out of the *present* and the coming of which is in no way conditioned upon any human effort or activity in improving existing conditions. This perfect and future society will come suddenly from above when Christ returns to reign with his faithful saints, and since it comes without human effort the true attitude of the saint would seem to be resignation to what now is and a spirit of patient but hopeful waiting for the deliverance of the Lord when he comes; but too great interest in the vain and fleeting things of the earth tends to distract attention from the eternal values of future and blessed life of the saints of God. Some such attitude as this, perchance, characterized the early church which saw itself surrounded by a mighty pagan civilization that it was impotent to change, but there is little justification for a similar view in our present civilization which is so full of moral meaning and so hopeful for the realization of a higher spiritual life.

There is moral energy in a religious faith which proclaims the infinite worth of the human soul, the spiritual kinship of

man with man and with God, and which sees in the associated struggles and activities of men the unfolding of a divine purpose and the realization of values of eternal significance. The faith in the unfolding life of God in the developing spiritual life of mankind gives courage to earnest souls to toil like Moses in the wilderness and to die with only a vision of the promised land, but with the full assurance that others will yet enter into possession and enjoy the fruits thereof. But a religious view of life that after all the sufferings and struggles of centuries robs the attainments of the human spirit of any enduring worth; that empties the present life of all meaning only to find satisfaction in the future; that sunders the future from the present by separating the consummation of the Kingdom from all human efforts and sacrifices and attainments, is an unsocial, unethical and magical view of religion that can never find an enduring place in the realized spiritual life of mankind. In such a religious message there is no guidance to industrial toilers, nor indeed to any earnest soul who believes in the worth of his race and the enduring value of the civilization it is seeking to create. No! We must find the divine in the human; our religion must assure us of the endurance of those values whose worth has been brought home to us by toil and travail of soul; it must encourage our hearts and strengthen our weak wills with the assurance that in rearing this structure of the associated spiritual life of our race we are working together with God, and that the coming of His Kingdom is by the fruition and attainment of our own ideals.

A considerable number of ministers take the ground that the object of the church is the salvation of the *individual*, and if he can be led to regeneration of life, the social order can be left to take care of itself. If the individual man can be made honest, sober, industrious, and upright, our social problems will all be solved. They hold that the minister does not need to know the solution of economic and social problems, but that he needs to know the gospel and to preach it with all the energy

of his soul with the assurance that when the will of God is the law of the individual, the love of God will become the law in a new social order.

Moreover, this position is often stated in the modern pulpit as an alternative, one might almost say as antagonistic, to a salvation by social reform. The minister emphasizes the imperative need of a *change of heart* or of inner life, and decries any hope of making men better by the change of mere outer conditions, as if the latter were another gospel seeking to take the place of the true gospel which alone has saving power. Do you seek to bring about social betterment? Then enter into the work of the church, preach the gospel that it proclaims, bring into the heart of the individual the saving knowledge of the grace of God, and you will see arising on earth a regenerated social order.

But is this position true either to the gospel message or to the needs of life? In the first place, is it true that if we could get the right attitude of heart on the part of the individual, we have solved thereby our economic and social problems? Undoubtedly we have gone a great way toward their solution, for good will is a most essential element, but a full solution demands, not only a willingness to do what is right, but also a *knowledge* of what the right is. The economic situation is exceedingly complicated and demands for its continued improvement the application of science, and its full solution demands greater scientific advancement and must come gradually as the race builds up greater wealth of social experience and more scientific knowledge of the social forces. Just what one ought to do in the complicated and intricate interrelations of modern economic life is not something that comes to a man intuitively with a change of heart. There are many men and women in our churches who occupy places of leadership therein who are yet engaged in economic warfare.

But what is meant by a change of heart which the gospel demands? Of what sins must one repent? What is involved

in the way of service in the new life of discipleship to the Christ? There are personal sins and social sins; and yet all sins are social, for there is no sin against God that is not sin against others. Theft, falsehood, adultery, murder—these are personal sins and yet they are social sins because they imply a wrong relation to others. Personal morality represents habits and ways of acting that have been worked out in a long past and have won universal recognition and approval, but social morality represents values and ways of action that are in the process of creation in the novel conditions of today. What is social morality today may be the personal morality tomorrow, and both must be taken into consideration to appreciate our full responsibility to our fellows. Shall repentance for sin be confined to personal sins or shall it include the great social sins, the vital ways in which selfishness and greed wrong the lives of others? Shall the righteousness demanded by the Christ be but the habitual righteousness of personal morality or the higher righteousness of love which makes its appeal to the conscience of the social citizen? If the gospel message is to present its great moral imperative to the men and women of today, it must demand that higher righteousness which is attained in the realization of social ends, in industrial, political, and other vocations, but yet, these ends are only capable of attainment by some understanding of the forces and principles that govern the social life.

But, granted the contention that a changed individual means a changed social structure, yet the question arises, how change the individual except through some change in the social structure? The whole philosophy of modern education is based upon the principle that to bring about an inner change in the individual you must change his environment. There is no other way by which we can afford guidance or direction to the lives of others; we cannot enter the inner consciousness of an individual and get hold of his will and compel his reaction, but we can so direct and select the stimuli that reach him as to

encourage some reactions and to discourage others. We may universalize this principle and state that the only way of producing a change of heart or moral purpose in an individual is by producing some change in the conditions under which he lives. Herein is the great moral significance of the economic process, the effect it is having upon the reactions and experiences of the lives of those engaged in it. The minister with his gospel of personal salvation for the individual reaches men through the environment; he may make use of only a small portion of that environment; his method may be simple and direct involving very little analysis and use of environmental factors, but it is none the less instrumental in that it does make use of changes in the customary environment to accomplish his purpose. For example, he persuades a man to attend his church or Bible class, or he gets a fellow-worker to persuade him and seeks to reach him through these new associations that bring into his mind new ideas. Perhaps he opens a Bible school and undertakes to reach the children for Christ and the church. His workers bring a little lad into the Bible school but they find that he cannot read; so to produce a change of heart they teach the lad to read; or perchance the little fellow stays away because he has not proper clothing in which to appear, and so the ladies make him a suit of clothes; or his brain is undernourished so that he cannot learn and he must have wholesome food; or he lives in such unsanitary conditions that his health is being undermined; or the moral teaching in the Bible school is being offset by the immoral influences under which he lives each day, and in order to bring about his change of inner life all these things must be met and remedied. Indeed, many of these conditions may arise from some economic disturbance so that the minister when he takes his work seriously is brought face to face with the need of a careful analysis of all the environmental factors to lead the individual to the right attitude of heart, to the attainment of a rich and satisfying inner life. He may not indeed undertake the education or care of

the health of his little Bible-school pupil, but he will co-operate with the ordinary school and the health department and with other institutions that minister to his manifold needs, realizing that these institutions are also engaged with him in the mission of saving souls in providing the conditions essential for the development of a wholesome all-round personal life.

That there is no way of perfecting the individual except through a reconstruction of society is the message not only of the gospel with its Kingdom, but of Plato, of Aristotle, and of the great prophets and teachers of every race and time. Individualism and socialism are alike partial and abstract; one would produce a good individual without regard to the environment, and the other would have a good environment in general apart from the peculiar needs and reactions of individuals. Society is not a collection of individuals like shot in a bucket; the individual is social in his inmost nature; the social and the individual are aspects of one life-process. The individual is the center of all appreciation, he initiates all action. There is no salvation for him that is not a salvation *within* him, that does not come home to his consciousness in the way of appreciation, of inner reconstruction of life and purpose. All moral reform must aim to develop this individual reaction, and is a failure if it does not accomplish this result. The only real and lasting help we can bring to others is to enable them to help themselves; but to lead an individual to that place where he will make an inner reconstruction, we must get him to evaluate his life through an appreciation of the highest spiritual values of the race. The gospel message has both its individual and its social aspect, and he that neglects either is true neither to human needs nor to the spirit of the gospel.

Another view of the function of the minister with respect to economic conditions is that he should confine his ministry to *established* truths and leave alone controversial questions in which emotional reactions are strong; otherwise he will weaken the force of his message in other realms of truth and introduce

division within his church. Undoubtedly the minister needs tact and insight; he should leave alone the political and economic questions where the ethical and religious interests are indirect and remote, but he should not refrain from leadership in morals and religion because his task demands intelligence and courage of a high order. All modern problems are complicated and more or less controversial. The family is an institution of great moral and religious import, yet its problems are exceedingly complex and involve questions that are biological, psychological, economical, ethical, and sociological in character. Unless the minister provides moral and religious guidance in such vital interests as those of the family and the industrial life of his people, his social significance is not important. It is true that he cannot be a specialist in all these subjects, but he should be a specialist in morals and religion, and he must make use of the achievements of workers in other realms as they borrow from each other. Unless he undertakes such a task, he must confine himself to the ethical values that have been universally accepted, the personal morality of today. Is religion to be concerned entirely with the conservation of past achievements but to have no part in the creation of new values? If its whole function is to be a bulwark of the established order, a support of the system that now obtains, then it must expect the liberal and striving souls of the present generation to turn away from it and to hold that its fate and future are bound up with the institutions that it conserves. Is there not danger that the minister who never introduces these living issues for fear of controversy may lose the regard and co-operation of thoughtful and noble souls who are seeking a religious interpretation of the social activities of their time?

There remains only the view that the minister should assume his leadership as the "guide and inspirer of social ends and motives" in every vocation and interest of life. It is held by some that he can perform this function with considerable

success without any profound or expert knowledge of social conditions or of economic science. The minister can present the great moral and social truths of the Christian faith and may test all activities by these values. Does the freedom of the child of God imply therewith sufficient control over the material conditions to insure positive and real control of life? Does faith in the infinite value of the soul carry with it a subordination of material goods to the common welfare? Does the law of love demand a reorganization of industry, or how does it square with the moving impulse in economic activity? Are the goods being produced such as make for real welfare and happiness? Is the productive process reacting back into the lives of the producers to make them more intelligent and worthier persons? Are the commodities distributed in a manner to produce the greatest happiness and to promote greater efficiency in future production and greater achievements in the spiritual life? One may indeed test modern industry by these moral and religious standards and with considerable profit, for oftentimes the leaders of industry have become so absorbed in the means of production as to neglect the ends that industry should serve. An earnest presentation of these values may lead them with their full knowledge of the means and methods of production to an application that the preacher could not outline or undertake. But too much value must not be attached to an attempt to direct and interpret the moral and religious aspects of industry without a careful study of the immediate industrial conditions in the community and a mastery of the principles of economic science. For when general rules or values are presented in a detached and abstract manner, they are generally assented to, because they mean everything in general and nothing in particular and lead to no definite and positive action. It is quite true that we have analyzed the past experience of the race and have abstracted therefrom for future guidance certain aspects that we regard as values and others that we regard as means or as instrumental,

but this is a methodological device for control and direction of activity. Ends and means are but aspects of one process of life; the moral virtues are but the habits or ways of action that were useful to achieve certain satisfactions, and the means and ends evolved together and are always relative to each other. We are living under new conditions of material production; we have a great increase and change of the material means, and we need to reconstruct our ends in the light of these material changes. Our ends must be *new* ends, not merely the old ones over again, and they can get new content only by a careful consideration of the means at hand; and these in turn are means only with reference to the proposed and projected ends. Human values are no more final than are material processes and commodities, and whatever may perchance be the view of the minister as to the direction in which the economic process is tending or should tend in order to give greater efficiency and consequently a higher morality, he will undertake the interpretation of existing conditions under which men and women live and labor and look to him for guidance. He will seek to bring to these problems and issues a wider outlook and a deeper insight that will bring greater meaning to those engaged therein and thereby enable them to live more rational and moral lives.

There is no way the minister can become an interpreter of the religious and ethical significance of the economic life in his community except through an earnest, careful, and intimate study of the economic processes about him as interpreted by a knowledge of the principles of economics and sociology. The existing system of industry is a complicated one; much production is carried on under a system of wages and profits; but production under municipal and state ownership and control is becoming an important factor, and there are great movements of voluntary co-operation. The minister of today lives in a period of experimentation, and all these processes should have his sympathetic attention and interpretation.

“Is the system in which one works for wages and another for profits fundamentally Christian, anti-Christian, or neutral?” The wise minister will probably not deal with systems as such nor with such general terms as wages or profits, but with the actual and concrete conditions that he finds in the industrial world about him. Do profits, for example, include interest on investment, insurance for risk, high wages for exceptional ability, rent for special privileges, a purely speculative gain? The wise minister will find a different moral worth in these different kinds of profits; he will differentiate the profits that arise from marked efficiency in the application of science to production or for outstanding excellence in organization and administration from the profits that come through a corner on special privileges or knowledge, or from conditions so purely speculative as to resemble the gambler’s gains.

Then, do wages include the remuneration of the university professor, the salary of the high-priced official, the fees of the professional man, the yearly payment of the hired man on the farm, and the weekly or hourly payment of the factory employee? The moral character of the wage in question will depend in large measure upon the nature of the specific wage contract. Is it a contract that affords stability of employment? Is there insurance for accident or unemployment? Does it provide that the laborer shall have a voice in the determination of the conditions under which he labors? Is his partnership and place in the industry recognized in such a manner as to call out his loyalty and best efforts? Here, again, the discreet minister may not indulge in generalities, but he will understand actual local situations, the present-day movements in industry, and the opportunities for the improvement of industrial and social conditions, and should be able to interpret the industrial situations facing employers and employees in his community with a sympathy and insight that would lead to helpful action and to increase his influence as a moral and social leader.

The true minister will seek to inspire men in every vocation to serve their fellowmen in the spirit of the gospel, to accept their daily work as their greatest opportunity to aid in the establishment in the Kingdom of God. For such a herculean task the minister should be noble of soul, should be given the best training in the social sciences our universities can provide, and should have courage, tact, and sympathy in an unusual degree. If such might in truth become the recognized function of the ministry, what a challenge this vocation would offer to the biggest brains and noblest hearts among us. That this change of emphasis would require a vigorous reorganization of the curriculum of studies for a minister is admitted. But is such a reorganization not inherently desirable?